

“ON GOVERNANCE”

A Dialogue by Joseph Nunez



“Gouverner, c'est voler. Tout le monde sait ça.”

-Albert Camus, *Caligula*

"On Governance"

Dramatis Personae:

A Talking Head

Amos - A Politician

Ensemble - Offstage twelve people

An Undertaker

A grimy factory floor. Immensely cluttered with random debris and garbage. Centrally there is a wooden stool. Sitting atop this stool is a small and old television. It is not plugged in. Adjacent to the stool is a large wooden table. Encasing this space are walls of tall pale switchboards decorated with many dials, levers, cogs, buttons, and various bells and whistles. They appear randomly assorted and completely nonsensical. A large black furnace sits on the right. A large industrial fan is placed up against the white plaster back wall. There is a closet on the left and an entrance/exit on the right. AMOS lies asleep on the floor, he is dirty and unkempt. He wears a pinstripe jacket and slacks

both in very poor condition. His lapel is adorned with many red white and blue, political campaign pins. Suddenly the small television hums and begins to emit a white glow. On the screen the TALKING HEAD appears. His image is grainy but voice is clear. He is visible from the torso up. His hands are folded on the desk before him. He wears a gray jacket and is well groomed. The backdrop behind him should resemble that of a typical evening news program.

Talking Head: **(laconic)** No-thing new in the news. (pause)
(shuffles papers) No specialty reports. **(smooths jacket)**
(pause) Crime? Why, its at an all time low! The weather?
Uncertainty. Surely mild though, I suppose. **(checks watch)**
Eyewitnesses say there's a breeze coming o'er the bay. **(tugs at shirt collar)** Perhaps there will be hail (pause) or locusts, tomorrow, or the day after that. But for now.
No-thing new in the news. **(sullen)** All is just as it was yesterday and the day before. **(Droning in a trance-like state)**
Pol-itics. Gas-tro-nomy. As-tro-logy. Ec-ono-mics. For-eign po-li-cy. **(coughs)** Excuse me. Re-lig-ion. Cine-ma. Sp-orts.
Yes. **(shouting to AMOS)** Did you hear me? I have said nothing! Nothing at all! **(laughing forcefully)**

(ENSEMBLE roars with laughter offstage followed by claps and cheers. Hammering noises begin offstage)

Amos: (stirs then wakes with a start) (ENSEMBLE silence)
Oh! (Manically rushes to the switchboards on the right)
(begins pushing buttons and pullings levers) (self-reassuring)
I, to lead men. I, to turn the wheel of governance! (freezes
takes a seat in "The Thinker" position pensively) (pause)
(stands up) (faces the audience) Why do we...remain...here?
(impatient) Why do we remain here? (stamps feet then returns
to sitting position) (silence)

(wailing sirens erupt)

Talking Head: (shouting over clamour) To be our leader!
(Slams fist on the table) To make yourself useful damn it!

(ENSEMBLE begins chattering backstage repeating "to make
yourself useful" and "to be our leader!", their voices are
overpowering)

Amos: **(frightened)** **(rushes to the switchboards on the left and resumes fretting over the buttons and levers)** Useful. I, to be made useful. **(shouting)** But how!? **(lever breaks)**
(ENSEMBLE silence) **(to the talking head)** Why won't you help me?

Talking Head: Don't ask me.

Amos: **(to the audience)** Why won't you help me?

Talking Head: Because I don't have arms.

(Hammering resumes)

Talking Head: I simply haven't the means.

Amos: Then how am I supposed to get along?

Talking Head: On your own.

Amos: **(despairingly)** Am I being punished?

Talking Head: Inadvertently.

Amos: **(weeping)** Whom do I answer to for my crimes?

Talking Head: Nobody in particular.

Amos: **(wiping tears)** I think I will step outside.

Talking Head: I wouldn't recommend it.

Amos: Why not?

Talking Head: **(woeful)** There's a whole society out there. They would lose their minds. They would probably eat you alive.

Amos: A whole society? How frightening. **(shudders)**
(returns to sitting position)

(Cathedral bells begin chiming, ENSEMBLE chatter resumes but quickly dies down)

Amos: **(frustrated)** I, to lead men! I, to turn the wheel of governance! **(scans the room anxiously)** But how? (pause)
(suddenly with confidence) SWIFTLY! We must act swiftly, just and efficient. **(stands up)** Men and women need **(racking brain)** Leaders! Yes! That's exactly what I shall be. A leader!
(begins his process of tinkering with dials) (draws a small notepad from jacket pocket and writes down notes). Hmmm...
(strokes chin) Agh. **(to the TALKING HEAD)** I don't understand.
(pause)

Talking Head: **(curtly)** I know.

Amos: Why must it be this way? **(no answer)**

Talking Head: Nothing new in the news. Our leaders? Why they are the most competent! Leadership? It is swift, just and efficient. (coughs loudly) Excuse me. (Pause)

(hammering resumes)

Amos: (Annoyed) What are you rambling about?

Talking Head: I mean. All is just as it was yesterday and the day before.

Amos: You mean it's futile?

Talking Head: Yes.

Amos: And its aimless?

Talking Head: Surely.

Amos: and its without purpose?

Talking Head: There is none.

Amos: No rhyme or reason?

Talking Head: Yes.

Amos: **(despairingly)** Why won't you help me?

Talking Head: I am the peanut gallery.

Amos: Why must I suffer?

Talking Head: If not our leaders then whom? **(consoling)**
Your efforts are appreciated nonetheless.

Amos: By? (silence) **(pushing buttons listlessly)** **(softly to himself)** By whom? The Priests? The Generals? The Weavers? The Carpenters? The Paupers? The Noblemen? No, I can't tell. There is no light outside. I cannot see their faces.

Talking Head: They left us this room though! How thoughtful of them! We haven't the slightest clue as to how our duties are performed, but they left us this room, and their contraptions. I am content.

(hammering resumes)

Amos: Who?

Talking Head: The founding fathers.

Amos: **(looks around)** Where are they?

Talking Head: Dead.

Amos: And what did they leave us?

Talking Head: Debt.

Amos: Fair enough. We were going to have to pay eventually. **(shrugs)**

Talking Head: Very true. An astute observation you've just made! **(orating)** Systems like ours do not function on the good-will of its citizens solely.

Amos: Yes, that's why we need money. Capital.

Talking Head: **(suggestively)** Perhaps, (pause) the more capital we accumulate the likelier we are to do our jobs correctly?

Amos: Sound logic. **(moves across the floor but trips)**
(angrily) God Dammit! **(stands up and kicks a box across the stage)**

(AMOS exits on the right and returns with a large burlap sack)

Amos: **(Lifts sack onto the wooden table laboriously)**
Phew! **(wipes brow)** **(unties a rope secured around the bag)**
(excited) Aha! **(dozens of green bundles of cash spill out of the bag onto the table and the floor)** **(picks up a bundle and thumbs through it hungrily. Then suddenly he opens the door to the furnace and throws the bundle of cash into the furnace chamber. Continues to toss bundles in. Retrieves a bottle of lighter fluid and proceeds to pour the clear fluid over the mound of cash)** **(to the talking head)** Got a light?

Talking Head: **(Dozing off)** Huh?

Amos: **(emphasis)** A light. **(makes a gesture signalling matches)**

Talking Head: Don't bother me.

(hammering resumes)

Amos: Nevermind. **(annoyedly)** I forgot you're completely useless. **(Rummages through a box on the floor and discovers a box of matches)** There. **(taunting)** You see, I don't need you.

Talking Head: Don't fool yourself.

Amos: Shut up! Be quiet. **(Staring at the mound of cash. Then lights a match and tosses it into the furnace)**

(Flames erupt from the furnace. Amos proceeds to smile widely and clap his hands whilst dancing in a tribal fashion around the furnace)

Talking Head: No-thing new in the news. Poverty? Why, its at an all time low! Un-employment! Nearly non-existent! All is just as it was yesterday (pause) and the day before.

(The large fan immediately turns on, blowing loose hundred dollar bills across the stage. Preferably into the audience. The clamour of the bells, sirens, and ENSEMBLE erupt into a deafening crescendo. "We need money!" "Capital!", "Poverty? Its at an all time low!" "Unemployment? Non-existent!". ENSEMBLE, Amos, and The Talking Head burst out into rolling laughter. This lasts for sixty seconds growing progressively weaker. The laughter subsides and is followed by complete silence for thirty seconds. The fan shuts off)

Talking Head: You think that worked?

Amos: Who's to say? (eyes grow wide with anxiety) (starts blowing on the fire exasperatingly) (coughs loudly) Excuse me. (resumes blowing on the fire) I (blows raspberry) to (raspberry) lead (raspberry) men (raspberry) (coughs loudly and falls over) (silence). I dont think its working.

Talking Head: You are right.

Amos: How am I supposed to be a leader if I fail to see the outcome of my efforts?

Talking Head: You're blind and incompetent. You know nothing of this machine called "governance" . (gestures to the room). Still it's best that you remain here. If not to

properly conduct yourself then to preserve our sanity. They say our government used to roar with life, our politicians like thousands of red blood cells. Each belt, dial, cog, lever and button had a specific purpose. We shall never know again.

(defeated) Everything is just pointless and dusty. All is just as it was yesterday and the day before.

(hammering resumes)

Amos: You heard these stories from whom?

Talking Head: (Pause) That's none of your business.

(embarrassed)

Amos: **(frustrated)** Why do you behave like this?

Talking Head: **(flushing)** Like what?

Amos: Like you have something to hide.

Talking Head: Because I do.

Amos: Do what?

Talking Head: Have something to hide.

Amos: Where?

Talking Head: **(embarrassed)** Over there. **(points)**

Amos: **(walks to the closet and places his hand on the knob)**

Talking Head: Wait!

Amos: What?

Talking Head: I am ashamed.

Amos: You should be. **(proceeds to open the closet and walk inside)** **(Three skeletons falls out of the closet into full view)** **(Murmur and giggles of the ENSEMBLE can be heard)** **(AMOS returns with a nude, mannequin in full makeup under his arms)** **(Places the mannequin next to the TALKING HEAD)** **(He sits before them)**

Talking Head: Oh my! **(flushes deep red)** You couldn't have granted her a little decency? Fix this immediately. **(waves AMOS away)**

Amos: **(stands up again and walks back into the closet and returns with a blonde wig)** **(places the wig atop the mannequins head)** There.

Talking Head: Thank you.

Amos: **(to the mannequin)** So is he your confidant? **(points to the TALKING HEAD)**

Talking Head: **(scoffs)** That's generous. A few secrets here and there never hurt anyone. Especially in your profession!

Amos: **(to the TALKING HEAD)** Is she your mistress?

Talking Head: **(guilty)** I wouldn't go so far as to say THAT....

Amos: **(to the mannequin)** You wouldn't tell him anything you haven't told me right?

Talking Head: What a ridiculous question. Of course she has. Good lord. **(to the mannequin)** Don't entertain such lunacy Marianne.

Amos: Marianne? **(angrily)** That isn't the name we agreed on! Are we all keeping secrets now?

Talking Head: She prefers Marianne.

Amos: **(offended)** This is the first time i'm hearing of this! **(to the mannequin)** How can you stand to withhold such information from me? You were supposed to council me **(under breath)** crooked wretch.

Talking Head: **(listening)** What's that, you ill mannered swine? Repeat yourself pig.

Amos: I said, **(takes a deep breath) (explosive)** DAMN YOU WRETCH! LYING BITCH! **(To the talking head)** YOU TOO! USELESS CRETIN! **(Moves to the switchboard and violently smashes buttons with fists)**

(hammering resumes)

Talking Head: You've gone mad.

Amos: **(enraged)** How do you suppose one should sift through lies and deception? **(To the mannequin)** Have you been providing me false information my entire life? That is certainly what it seems like.

Talking Head: What do you have to lose?

Amos: Nothing. Even then I don't appreciate being lied to. An affair with my secretary? Sure, I will let that slide. But withholding information? It has only plunged me further into the depths of my own uncertainty. How am I supposed to fulfill my duties as a leader now?

Talking Head: Don't ask me.

Amos: **(to the audience)** How am I supposed to fulfill my duties (pause) if I haven't the slightest clue what they are. Or even how to accomplish them. Useless! That's what you've made me! **(kicks switchboard angrily)** Completely out of touch I have become with myself (pause) and the society I apparently govern. I have found solace in the cold affirmation of negligence. Transparent! **(to the mannequin)** That's what you were supposed to be goddammit!

(hammering resumes)

Talking Head: Calm down. You're behaving irrationally.

Amos: **(coldly)** You said it yourself. There's no rhyme or reason.

Talking Head: That's nonsense. Come now relax.

Amos: **(to the mannequin)** The moment the wool is pulled back from my eyes your stupid lips are sealed. Am I here simply for your amusement?

Talking Head: It's so much more than amusement my child. It's the very fabric of society you're holding together.

Amos: I'm leaving.

Talking Head: If you were to leave, we would return to lawless degeneracy.

Amos: Fabric be damned. It's about time I take a look outside. **(moves towards the exit on stage right)**

(Deafening clamour erupts, the uproarious chatter of the ENSEMBLE rises with the sounds of sirens and cathedral bells. The hammering is louder than it ever has been before)

Amos: **(moans in pain) (covering ears)** Why? Why must I live this darkness and confusion? **(to the audience)**
(screaming) SOMEONE ANSWER ME! **(gets down on knees)**

(ENSEMBLE and the TALKING HEAD begin repeating in unison "You, to lead men. To turn the wheel of governance")

Amos: (defeated) I can't. Cease thy dissonance. (draws a silver revolver from jacket pocket)

(ENSEMBLE and TALKING HEAD chanting the same refrain)

Amos: (weeping pointing revolver to his right temple)
(pause) I simply haven't the means. (Pulls trigger and a small red flag reading "BANG" pops out) (screams exaggeratingly and collapses playing dead) (silence) (long pause) (ENSEMBLE weeps mournfully)

Talking Head: No-thing new in the news. (sullen)
Governance? Why...I wouldn't wish it upon my worst enemy. This (gestures to amos) is the result of such an abhorrent devotion. (looks down at the corpse of AMOS) But! Elections will summarily take place as per usual. Voter turnout? Why, its at an all time high! We will have a new leader in no time!

(hammering resumes and lasts sixty seconds)

(Enter Undertaker with a hammer dangling prominently from his tool belt. He is drags a coffin to where AMOS lies. He picks up his corpse and places him inside the crudely fashioned wooden coffin and laboriously drags him offstage. The mournful cries of the ENSEMBLE grow louder)

Talking Head: (calm) All is just as it was yesterday and the day before.

(Cathedral bells chime ten times, mannequin falls over)

(Curtain)